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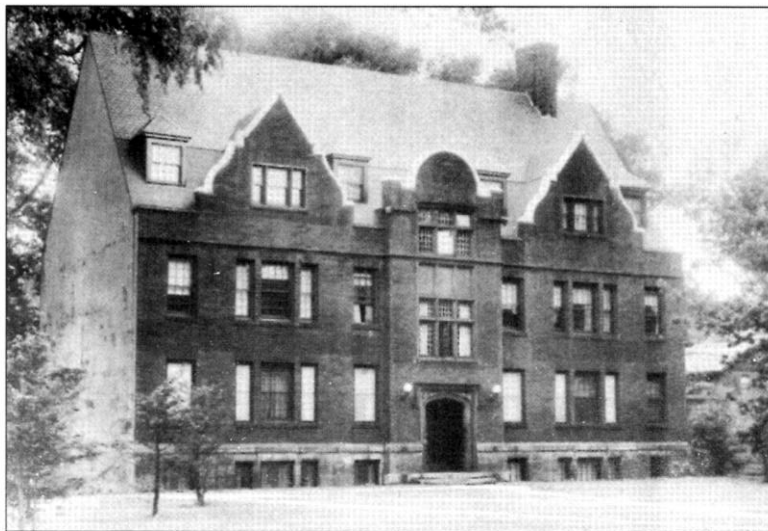
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A Brief Look at the 20th Century Through the Lens of a Camera

by Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck





Kendrick Hall, the first men's dormitory on the old University of Rochester campus, became the first women's campus.

Cover: The statue of Mercury atop of the Kimball Tobacco Company smoke-stack.

All photographs from the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library

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A Brief Look at the 20th Century Through the Lens of the Camera

In Rochester at the turn of the 20th century there was little of the wild celebration that one might expect for such a milestone. Newspapers instead looked back on the passing century. The 21st century, however, is the beginning of a new millennium. Newspapers report apprehension in the corporate and governmental realms where great dependence on computers and electronic communication has developed irreversibly. A look at Rochester's passing century gives barely a glimpse of the developments in business and manufacture, transportation and communication, education and lifestyles, roles of women and newcomers and changes in the city itself.

The history of a century can seldom be written by decades, rather our histories are more often divided by events, trends, periods— they expand and contract— elastic in their importance. Events of great importance in their day become lost through the century until some new event lifts them out to make connections and greater understanding of our present day. This article makes no attempt to be comprehensive-only to present a picture of where we have come from— how we got to where we are today.

Business and Manufacture

“In the nineties began the exodus of power from the simple millwheel to the scientific, but ancient turbine,” recalled Professor Ryland Kendrick in the 1940s. The city was untethered from the Genesee River by electricity after nearly a century, though the electricity was generated by waterpower as well. Kendrick noted industry's resulting freedom to expand: “... Tall chimneys with black smoke were already [by the 1890s] harbingers of a new industrial era in Rochester, which only for a time was limited, as if from habit, to the river's banks. And beginning in and from the nineties the industries with smoking chimneys began to dot the area of Rochester far and wide, and to create, not beside the river, but along the railways, new nuclei of population



The Erie Canal aqueduct carried its last boat in the 1919 season. The canal bed was purchased by the city of Rochester and used as a subway route until 1956 when declining ridership forced its closing. A street deck was built above the bed in 1921 when the old aqueduct became the Broad Street bridge. The Erie Canal needed to be enlarged as mule-drawn boats gave way to larger diesel-powered ones. The city could not accommodate the widening of the canal so it was rerouted south of the city through the Genesee Valley Park, amidst loud public protest. The park had been designed as a pastoral setting by famous landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted less than two decades prior. The dirty, working canal was a health hazard downtown and was viewed as an intrusion in the park. With the 1918 construction, the Erie Canal became a part of the New York State Barge Canal System, crossing at grade level over the Genesee River, rather than over an aqueduct.

and to enlarge the city's boundary beyond its early lines.”

In the early 20th century, the shoe and clothing industry was strong and the seed and nursery industry was on the decline. Many clothing factories began to move up St. Paul Street away from the river, creating a district. Bausch & Lomb and Kodak, both begun in the prior century, were growing. Precision instruments, lithography and other printing businesses were doing well. Rochester continued to be a place that encouraged invention and improvements in many fields such as automobiles, airplanes, photography, gears, machinery and communications apparatus, etc. Retail



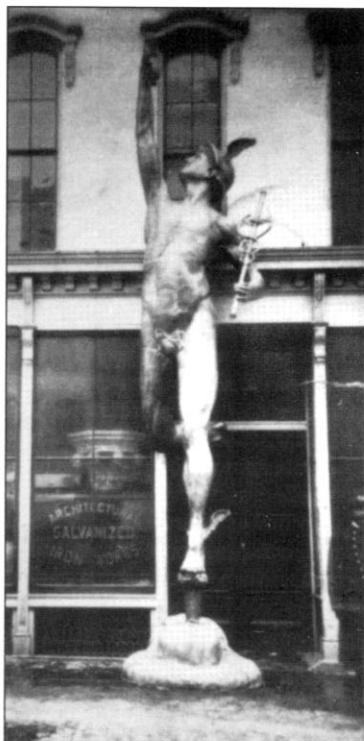
Susan B. Anthony (right) and her sister Mary in a photograph taken February 6, 1905 by G. A. Woodworth. Susan died the following year. Mary died in 1907. Mary did not receive the public acclaim that her sister achieved through her speaking tours and writings; but like many women of her time, she advanced womens rights by personal achievement. She was a public school teacher and the first female principal of a Rochester city school. While Susan toured the country agitating for woman's suffrage, Mary also kept house in the family home at 17 Madison Street.

stores were becoming more numerous and as the city grew, better stocked with imported goods.

Transportation and Communication

Bicycles were such a curiosity when they were first seen on the streets of the city that in 1869 the *Union & Advertiser* reported the names and addresses of the five owners, remarking that the bicycle would probably never catch on with the general public because a good bicycle with tools and tool bag could cost between \$100 and \$125. The *Rochester Herald* debated with the *Union & Advertiser* about whether the bicycle could be practical or was just a fancy toy for the wealthy. But bicycles became the rage of the 1890s and well into the 20th century; not as a form of exercise but as a convenient form of individual travel. Susan

The statue of Mercury graced the city's skyline for seventy years before it was taken down in 1951 to make way for the Community War Memorial. It was designed and erected in 1881 by Guernsey S. Mitchell for his brother-in-law, tobacco manufacturer William S. Kimball. Kimball's wife suggested a statue to beautify the smokestack of the Kimball Tobacco Company on Court Street at the Genesee River. Mercury may have been chosen as the subject because it symbolizes healthy trade and, as a god, is a guide to the less fortunate. In 1974 Mercury was reestablished to the skyline atop a brick tower specially built by Lawyer's Cooperative Publishing Company (today West Group) for their building across Broad Street from Mercury's original site. This stereo view offers a rare glimpse of the statue before it was erected. Throughout the 20th century it has been a symbol of Rochester's healthy economy and business creativity.



B. Anthony said it was a liberating invention for women. Bicycle makers were numerous— and quite inventive.

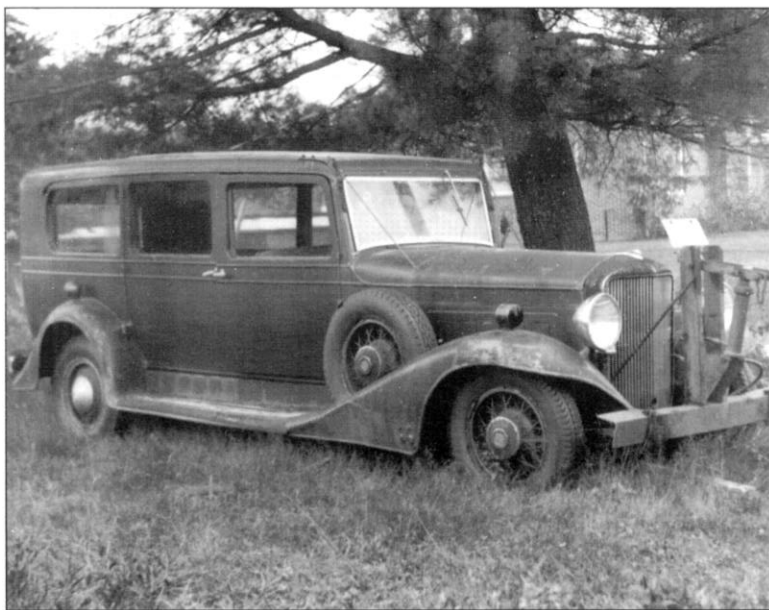
“The automobile began to bring in strange people and the motion picture furnished new notions,” noted Frank Goler in quoting Bellamy Partridge’s *Country Lawyer*.

There were numerous wagon and buggy manufacturers and automobile makers listed in the *Rochester City Directory* in 1900. Stables and liverys were scattered throughout the downtown near train stations and hotels. Hacks (horse-drawn taxis) rolled through the streets carting travelers between stage and hotel or canal or schooner. Buckboards, shays, vis-a-vis and stage coaches filled the busy streets. A few people rode horseback. The stage coach operated until 1911.

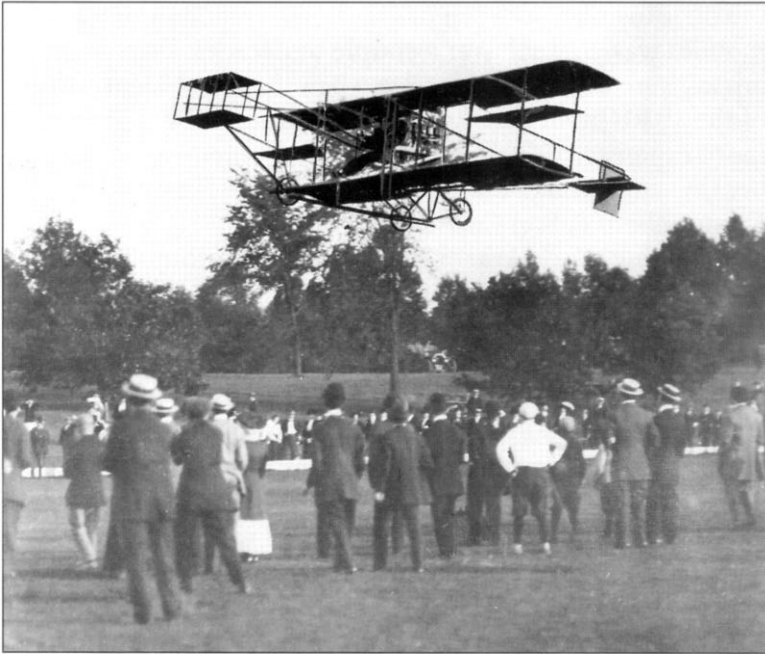
The transition between horse-drawn wagons and automobiles was gradual over a couple of decades; then again horses were drawn into service when the Great Depression of the 1930s made gasoline, tires and automobiles generally more expensive or unavailable. Many former wagon makers became automobile manufacturers like the James Cunningham & Son Carriage Factory.

Following World War II the number of automobiles dramatically increased. Throughout the 1950s people moved to the suburbs to enjoy the open space and the roads to the suburbs were improved. The buses that began to run in the late 1920s had taken much of the subway ridership, so that in 1956, the subway made its last run. With more flexibility in their routes, the buses continue beyond the 20th century.

For 75 years the Erie Canal wound its way through Rochester carrying boats heavily laden with market products from the mills and outlying farms. There was talk of enlarging the canal yet again; but this time routing it out-



The 1932 Cunningham Hearse Model W-1 with a Continental engine, manufactured in Rochester by the James Cunningham Company



In 1911 John J. Frisbee made a demonstration flight over Genesee Valley Park.

side of the city because there was no room downtown to widen its path. Besides, the canal boats were giving up the traditional mule power for the modern diesel engine—perhaps more dependable but no less odorous.

In 1905 work was underway to build the canal south of the downtown through the Olmsted designed Genesee Valley Park. The public outcry against the disturbance of the pastoral setting Olmsted had planned led officials to call on Olmsted's firm, then run by his nephews, to design a compatible set of pedestrian bridges over the canal to make it less intrusive. Nearly a century later, these bridges are still admired. Meanwhile, downtown, the old Erie was drained and the bed was bought by the city for a subway line. The second Erie Canal aqueduct became the foundation of the Broad Street bridge, carrying automobiles and pedestrians on its upper deck constructed in 1921-22 and the subway in the old canal bed below.



Women were first admitted to the University of Rochester in 1900. Without quite enough public monies collected, Susan B. Anthony and her sister, Mary pledged their life insurance when the university required \$50,000 to be raised to support the program. Women made great strides in civil rights in

the 20th century, though there was much work still to be done in such areas as education, work, military service, finance and marital status. Moving into the 21st century, women's rights took the greatest strides through the women whose personal achievements gave weight to their movement.

By the 1880s, fully two decades prior to the enlargement of the Erie Canal into the Barge Canal System, the railroads were taking over much of the former canal freight and passenger service. The pulse of the city's economy could be taken from the many arteries of rail lines running throughout the city; particularly along the river. The canal continued to carry the heaviest freight, being capable of moving the equivalent of ten railroad cars of goods on one barge. But it lacked the speed and flexibility of delivery the railroads offered.

Partly due to lack of commitment, the state dawdled at enlargement until the impending World War One created an urgency to its completion. The canal was not finished in time to be of much help to the war effort; but it served well to keep shipping costs down during the Great Depression just a decade later.

By the end of the 20th century the Erie Canal, part of the New York State Barge Canal System, has been redefined as a recreational and tourist asset to the state.

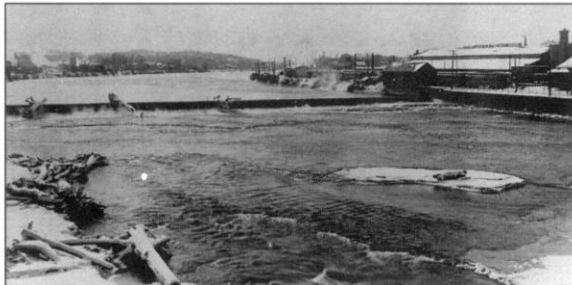
Rochesterians in 1900 were confident that man would soon be able to fly. By the end of the century, man had witnessed a man on the moon and was exploring interplanetary travel. Several Rochester area fliers built their own



Barges on the Genesee River docked on the east side of what has been a spur of the Erie Canal since its enlargement in 1918. Photograph is undated.

flying machines, demonstrated their abilities and exchanged notes on improvement to them. John J. Frisbee, a noted balloonist, flew over Genesee Valley Park to demonstrate to Rochesterians that planes could do more than short hops in the air. In his Curtiss plane, powered by an engine made by Rochester's Elbridge Engine Company, Frisbee set off on July 7, 1911 from Cobb's Hill flying northward toward the New York Central Railroad Depot following their tracks. He nearly crashed when his plane engine sputtered and the vibrations were so strong that he feared the plane could come apart; but he made the round trip flight, less than 300 feet in the air. In the days that followed there were other demonstrations of daring, entertainment, a race between a car and a plane and even a demonstration of what planes could do in war by dropping flour bag "bombs" on Com-

Since Elisha Johnson built the first dam spanning his east side property with the One Hundred Acre west side settlement, this section of the river has been dammed.



pany H, 3rd N.Y. Infantry, National Guard at Cobb's Hill. Few if any realized that the plane would be an integral part of the coming world war.

Though the Western Union Telegraph Company that was so skillfully organized by Hiram Sibley in the 19th century lasted through the 20th into the 21st century; other forms of communication emerged in the 20th century. Telephones began to appear in businesses in the final decades of the 19th century and became so numerous in the early 20th century that city streets were strung heavily with wires and businesses began to advertise their telephone numbers. By midcentury the facsimile, the photocopy, radio and television began to appear. By the end of the 20th century, the rapidly changing film and videography was changing to digital recording. Controversy over the most effective preservation and storage methods emerged. Broadcasts of television, radio and telephone communications moved from antennae to satellite. Many of Rochester's businesses



Midway through the century the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway began to reduce the shipments through Rochester. This steamer Bayfax is passing under the Stutson Street lift bridge at the opening of the shipping season in April 1949.



A recruit at the Kodak School of Aerial Photography is fast asleep with his two canine companions. For nine months, the school trained recruits for reconnaissance service in World War One.

were on the leading edge of invention and improvements in these fields. The colleges supplied the necessary knowledge and seedbed of creation.

Education and Lifestyles

The University of Rochester accepted its first female students in 1900 thanks to Susan B. Anthony, her sister, Mary and other forward thinking contributors to a female department. The women occupied the campus at Prince Street centered around what is today the Memorial Art Gallery. Susan B. Anthony died in 1906 having known the first group of women had received their diplomas, but she did not live to see women get the right to vote nationwide. During her lifelong campaign for women's suffrage she saw state after state slowly fall in line. She must have known that her campaign would finally succeed, but it was to another generation of women to complete.

The University continued to grow through the 20th century, in large part, because of the contributions of Kodak founder George Eastman. Mechanic's Institute, later known as Rochester Institute of Technology, also greatly benefited from Eastman's generosity, as it grew in size and the excel-

lence of students prepared to invent and improve Rochester's businesses and industries. The creation of Monroe Community College in the 1970s expanded education to a broader population and cooperated with four-year schools to continue degree programs begun at the two-year level. Nazareth College, SUNY at Empire State, Brockport and Geneseo, Roberts Wesleyan College and St. John Fisher College added to the strong base of education in Rochester.

At no point was the city's lifestyle more improved than in the area of health. Settlement houses started in the 19th century continued to work with neighborhood residents to teach healthy habits. At the turn of the 20th century one in four babies died before the age of five. Rochester's health was improving as the city's health officer George Goler conducted his milk campaign to end the death of babies due to "summer complaint;" a diarrheal condition caused by tainted, unpasteurized milk. New health laws requiring pasteurization and TB inspected dairy cows, greatly reduced the deaths among children under five.

In 1918 the great flu epidemic arrived in Rochester taking so many lives that for several weeks, caskets were stacked at cemeteries waiting to be buried. Hospitals became overcrowded.

There were at least seven breweries in 1919 when the 18th amendment ended production of most alcohol. Two Rochester brewers converted to dairy production while a few others produced a malt beverage under the legal alcoholic limit.

It was believed that prohibition would end death and illness due to alcohol consumption, but prohibition advocate, City Health Officer George Goler, learned that in fact there were more deaths because people drank poisonous home brews. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration saw the brewing industry as an opportunity to employ thousands of people. When Prohibition was repealed in April of 1933, Genesee Brewery was in place with the recipes of the original brewery and as many of the old experienced brewers as owner John Wehle could locate. A victory party was held in the Powers Hotel to



When Midtown Plaza opened in 1962, it was considered the first urban indoor shopping center with a parking garage under it. It established the retail section of downtown. The 28-foot-high Clock of the Nations shown here is the focal point of Midtown Plaza where many people made plans to "meet at the clock." By the end of the 20th century the downtown competed for shoppers with suburban shopping centers and malls. Cities across the country are redefining "downtown."

celebrate the repeal. By 1936 five breweries were back in business in Rochester including Genesee Brewing Company, American Brewing Company, Cataract Brewing Company, Rochester Brewing Company and Standard Brewing Company.

By the end of the 20th century the city's last brewery, the Genesee Brewing Company, was sold.

Newcomers

At the opening of the 20th century the largest groups of foreign born in the city were Italian and German. The Upper Falls area remained the neighborhood that received newcomers. The names of the streets changed over the years to reflect the various residents' roots. The churches continued to serve as the social and religious centers. German and Italian language newspapers kept the residents informed. During World War II, blacks from the South began to migrate to Rochester, many of them having either been migrant workers familiar with the opportunities in the city or related to people who made Rochester their home. The black community became the most significant in number by midcentury. By the 1970s people from Southeast Asia, China, Russia, Haiti and Puerto Rico joined the city's growing diverse population. Today there are many festivals to celebrate Rochester's diversity.



During Rochester's Sesquicentennial celebration in 1984 tall ships entered the Genesee River from Lake Ontario near the Stutson Street swing bridge. Rochester is entering its third century since the first settlers arrived. Over the past century the use of the harbor has changed from shipping to recreational boating.

Changes in the City

Frank Goler pointed out in a talk to the Rochester Historical Society in the 1940s, that “it was not man, but sheer untutored nature, that founded Rochester and shaped its future. It was the river Genesee- the swift onrush of untamed rapids and the foam and fury of its untrammelled falls. But it was wise and far-sighted men who saw and grasped this opportunity.” The Genesee powered the mills of the 19th century, generated the electricity of much of the 20th century, and remains the city’s urban planning focus for development along its banks into the 21st century. What Frank Goler expressed over sixty years ago can be repeated in the new century, “it was wise and farsighted men [and women] who saw and grasped this opportunity.”

The City in Pictures

The shutter of an old camera snapped by photographers who have long since passed on, placed in our archives the faces of fellow citizens; frozen in time, their shadows captured in film for historians to interpret [or misinterpret] a century or more later. What might a number of these photographs show us?

Page 18 & 19: Since the flood of 1865, studies have been conducted and retaining walls were built. Since Elisha Johnson built the first dam spanning his east side property with the One Hundred Acre west side settlement, this section of the river has been dammed. In the 1910s and 1930s, seventeen feet of rock was removed from the floor of the river allowing greater volumes of flood waters to pass through downtown. In 1918 the Court Street Dam was reconstructed, not for flood control, but to raise the level of the river behind it to maintain a constant ten foot depth for the canal boats that entered the Genesee River for the downtown dock. Flood control was considerably improved when the Mt. Morris Dam opened in 1951.

*Page 20 - 22: The evolution of the High Falls: only a few settlers' cabins overlook the falls in 1818 when French naturalist Jacques Gerard Milbert made this sepia drawing for *Amerique Septentrionale- Etat de Nev York*. Cows graze in the meadow that became the site of an RG&E plant and later city of Rochester public laser light shows. Page 22: The top view is of the same falls at the close of the 19th century when water power was beginning to be replaced by electricity generated from the river. The center photograph shows RG&E generating power from the water of the river, untethering factories from the banks of the Genesee. The final photograph near the end of the 20th century shows the "meadows" returned to a grassy lawn to serve as a public park and viewing area for the laser light show.*

Page 23: The Genesee River was under control after the opening of the Mt. Morris Dam in 1951 (not shown). The river's south entrance to the city offers a spectacular view of the skyline in the 1990s (above). The Court Street Dam is in the distance (below).

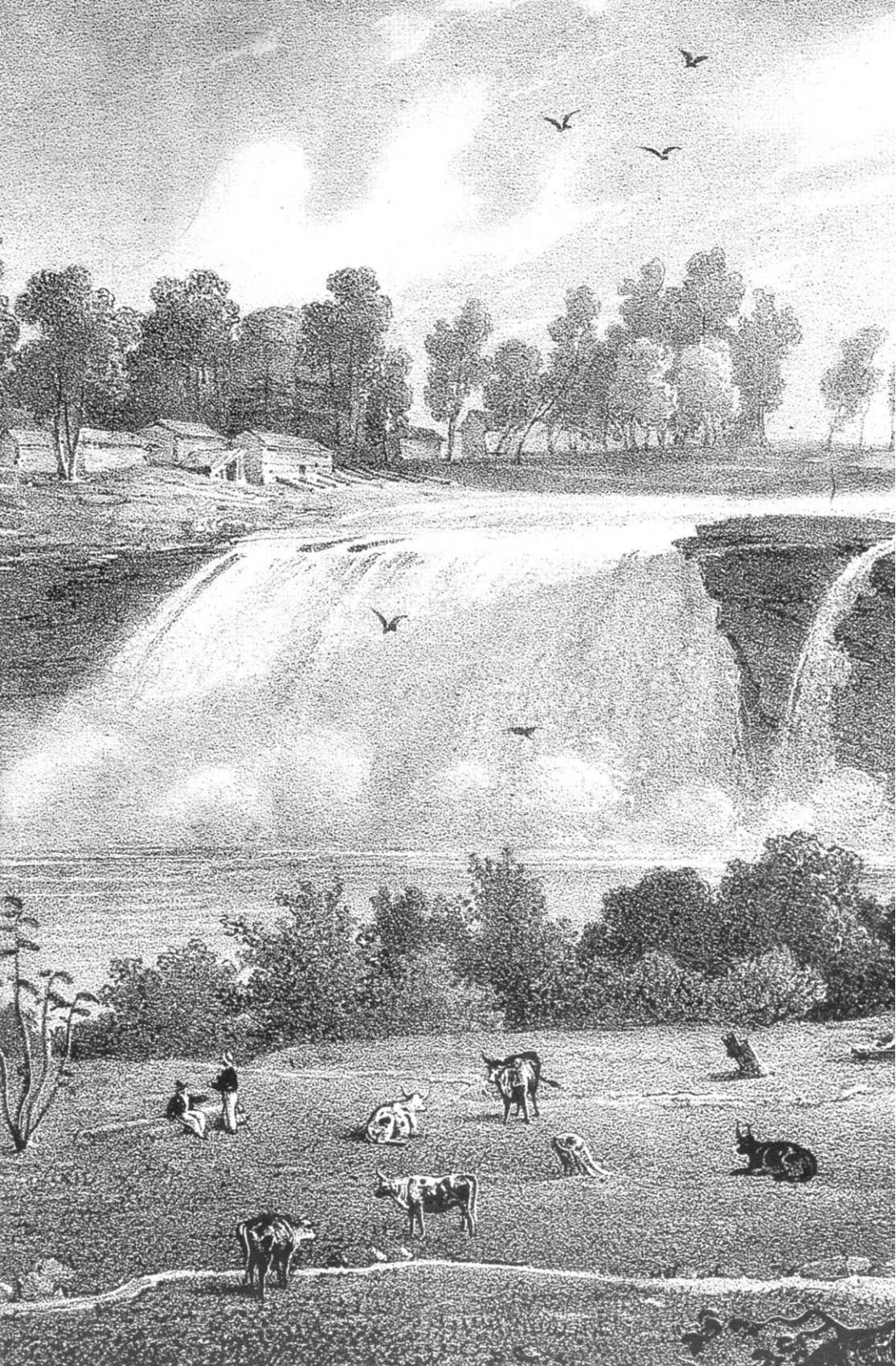
Pages 24 & 25: In the years following World War II the number of private cars dramatically increased. Roads were expanded and new ones built to the growing suburbs.

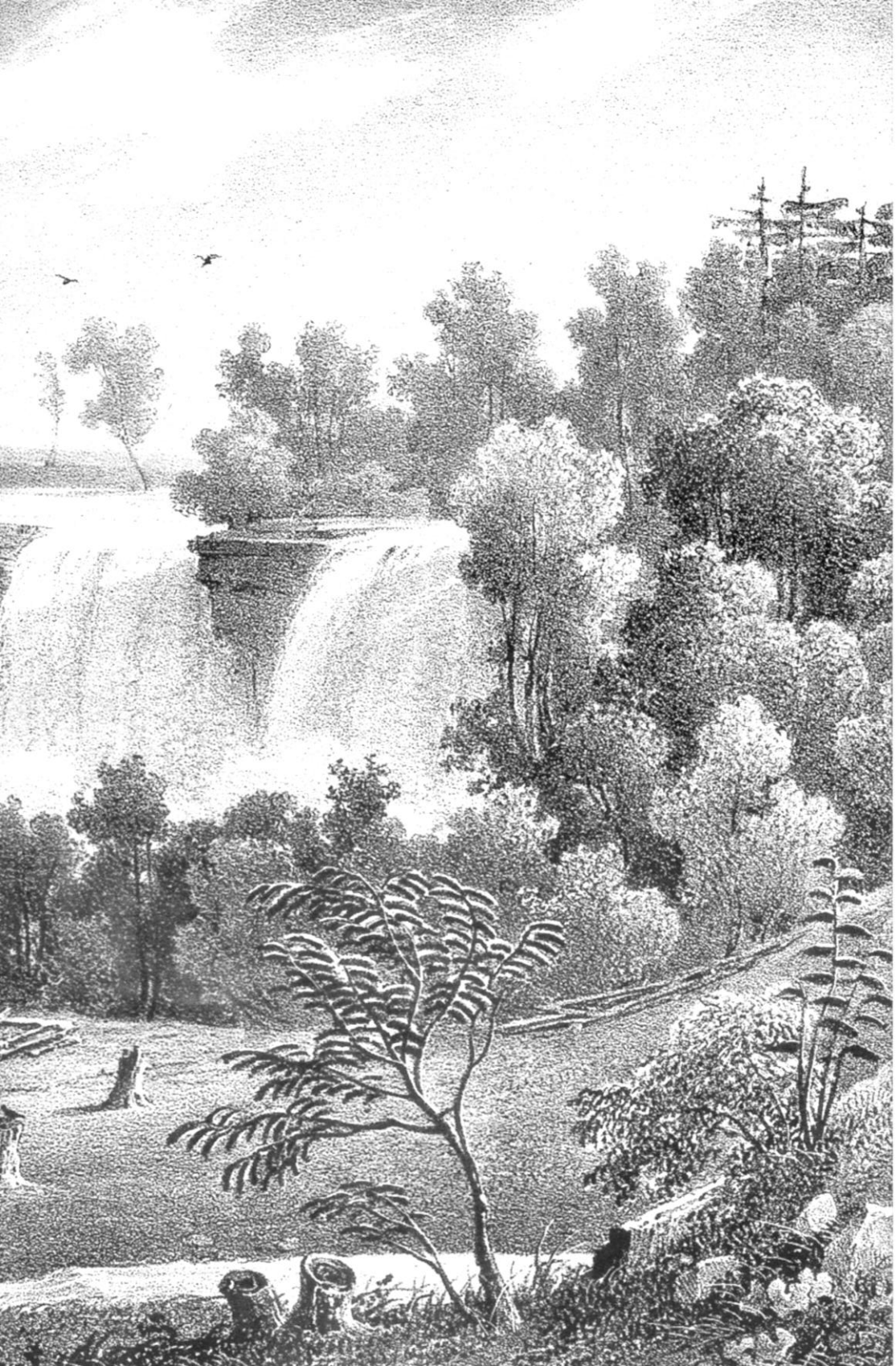
Page 26 Top: The public markets have been a mainstay since the beginning of settlement in the Rochester area; providing a ready market for farmers selling to city residents. Varieties of plants and foods unavailable anywhere else could be found at the markets. Immigrants found ready buyers for the foods they were used to in their homeland. This sale took place in 1949 in much the same way it did at the close of the 20th century. Vegetables that did not sell were peddled through the streets of residential neighborhoods.

Page 26 Bottom: The Rochester Municipal Airport about the time of its opening in June of 1928.







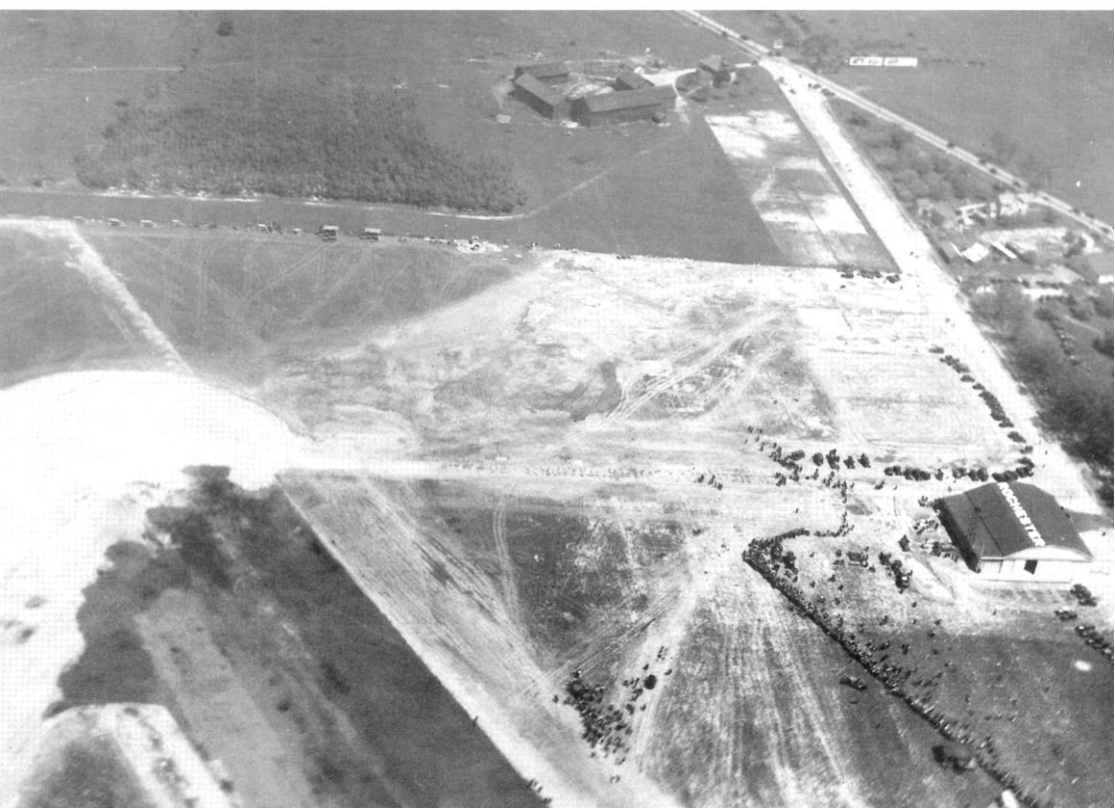












Page 28: Two world wars steeled Rochesterians to survive hardships while working closely together. Through both wars, residents worked in industry around the clock; and at home, rationed, recycled and made-do. Having recently recognized the 50th anniversary of World War II, the city enters the 21st century with the memory of that experience still fresh in mind. When the war against Japan ended, people gathered around a downtown newstand to read the Extra that was printed by the Times-Union (top). Also shown: The old Erie Canal aqueduct in the 1940s showing the functioning street deck and the subway access on the west side (below).

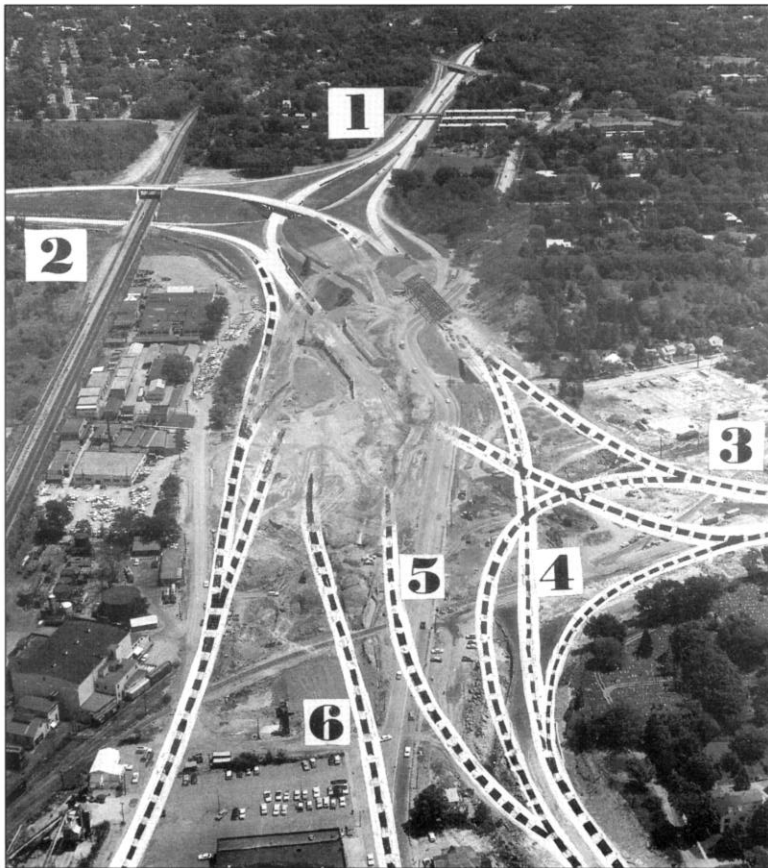
Page 29: Above: In 1955 the city was in the midst of urban renewal and the construction of the expressways— the Inner and Outer Loops— that carried the suburban travelers and city residents to and from work and shopping and expanding the range of the population. Nine years later, urban renewal became more intense as the riots of 1964 made clear the urgency of the need for more adequate housing, employment and education for the newly arrived black residents. Spring and Troup Streets and Plymouth Avenue are shown here. Below: Main Street Rochester in the early 1900s. For at least a decade into the 20th century, wagons, handcars, pedestrians and bicyclists filled the streets of the city. Notice the electrified street cars forecasting the future of the city. Half a century later automobiles and trucks filled the streets downtown at Four Corners.

Page 30: Unlike most other cities, Rochester had a branch library system before it could afford to build a central library (above). In 1911, art dealer Morton Rundel died, leaving the city money to build a library/art gallery. The family sued the city when it did not build after several years. The legal battle delayed the construction until the 1930s when federal funds dedicated to work relief during the Great Depression, became available. With the increase in funding, Morton Rundel's bequest built a fine library— the Rundel Memorial Library on South Avenue. Expanded in the last decade of the century, this Central Library now serves the public with multi-media information, computers, workspace, meeting and quiet recreational reading areas. The Library has expanded what was once book and art loaning to providing information services. The Memorial Art Gallery opened in 1912, and the Eastman School of Music in 1921 along with Eastman Theatre. The Municipal Museum, now Rochester Museum & Science Center, the Susan B. Anthony House, the Landmark Society, Genesee Country Village and Strong Museum opened in the 20th century. The Rochester Historical Society was founded in the late 19th century. WPA projects put workers like these men to work removing old trolley tracks during the country's greatest economic depression (below).









In 1961 the intersections of the Inner and Outer Loops opened with the nickname "Can of Worms." This section of the expressway includes 14 bridges within a few hundred feet as well as a triple deck segment. Even before it opened, apprehensive drivers indicated a need for redesign which eventually happened.

At (1) is the completed expressway headed west into the city. (2) marks the Outer Loop which will start at Sea Breeze. The Loop makes an S-turn and swings into the abandoned subway-Erie Canal bed (3) heading south. (4) is the eastbound lane of the Expressway while (5) is the westbound lane. Point (6) marks the relocated East Avenue, and (7) shows the new University Avenue hookup.

Back Cover:

*The city's skyline is seen in the background as the **Sam Patch** carries tourists on the Genesee River. Photo by Edward P. Curtis, Jr.*

